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ABSTRACT

The prime function of a special library is the correlation of all aspects of patron needs, coupled with extensive knowledge of the parent organization. Business librarians should be alert to their role as facilitators, and routing sheets are an example of internally generated information distribution. Feedback from employees can also provide the organization with timely material. (Author/DS)

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THE METHODOLOGY OF ASCERTAINING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF A PARTICULAR BUSINESS ORGANIZATION - THE SPECIAL LIBRARIAN

WITHOUT A PERCEPTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF CURRENT AND FORSEEABLE INFORMATION NEEDS, A SPECIAL LIBRARY OPERATES IN A VACUUM, UNABLE TO PERFORM ITS ESSENTIAL FUNCTION AS AN INFORMATION SPECIALIST. MORE SPECIFICALLY, IT CANNOT BUILD A RESPONSIVE COLLECTION OF VARIED AND UNIQUE MATERIALS, CANNOT PROVIDE USER-ORIENTED INFORMATION SERVICES, CANNOT SERVE AS A CATALYST IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION IN ANTICIPATION OF A NEED. IT CANNOT BE AN EFFECTIVE COMPONENT OF ITS ORGANIZATION.

TO DETERMINE THE INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS OF A BUSINESS ORGANIZATION, A LIBRARY MUST HAVE A CLEAR CONCEPTION OF ITS ROLE, CHARACTER, FUNCTIONS, AND OBJECTIVES. DOES IT SERVE ONE SPECIALIZED DEPARTMENT; IS IT ONE OF MANY DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES, OR DOES IT SERVE THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION? DO AUXILIARY FUNCTIONS INVOLVE EMPLOYEE EDUCATION, AS WELL AS INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC INTERESTS? WHO ARE THE USERS OF THE LIBRARY; WHAT ARE THEIR FUNCTIONS, ORIENTATIONS, PRIMARY SUBJECT INTERESTS, AND INFORMATION-HANDLING CAPABILITIES? THESE USERS INFLUENCE THE CHARACTER OF THE LIBRARY, THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE COLLECTION, AND THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF INFORMATION SERVICES. A LIBRARY'S CAPACITY TO

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IDENTIFY AND FULFILL THESE NEEDS IS DETERMINED BY ITS MATERIAL, PHYSICAL, AND HUMAN RESOURCES, INCLUDING STAFF COMMITMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN RELATING TO THE NEEDS OF THE ORGANIZATION. ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN THIS RESPECT IS ALSO DETERMINED BY THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE AND EVALUATE DIFFERING NEEDS WITH RESPECT TO THEIR IMPORTANCE TO THE ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION.

THE METHODOLOGY OF IDENTIFYING INFORMATION NEEDS IS ESSENTIALLY THE CONTINUOUS CORRELATION OF THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY WITH THE ORGANIZATION, THE INDUSTRY, AND THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT IMPACTING ON BOTH. WE CAN SAY THEN THAT THE METHODS EMPLOYED IN IDENTIFYING THE INTERESTS OF A PARENT ORGANIZATION ARE ESSENTIALLY THE APPLICATION OF JUDGMENTS BASED LARGELY ON THIS ENCOMPASSING KNOWLEDGE, NOT SUPERFICIAL BUT PROFOUND. WITH RESPECT TO THE PARENT ORGANIZATION, IT INCLUDES AN INFORMED UNDERSTANDING OF ITS PRODUCTS, MARKETS, FINANCIAL CONDITION AND GOALS, AS WELL AS THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, BACKGROUND OF KEY OFFICIALS, INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF DIVISIONS AND DEPARTMENTS, AND POLITICAL FORCES OPERATING WITHIN, ATTITUDES AND POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO ITS EMPLOYEES, ITS STATUS AND RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY, AND THE PUBLIC IMAGE IT PROJECTS. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT NO ONE, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE COMPANY PRESIDENT, NEEDS TO KNOW THE COMPANY MORE INTIMATELY THAN ITS LIBRARIAN. WHILE THIS MAY BE AN EXAGGERATION, THE STATEMENT IMPLIES THAT A SOPHISTICATED KNOWLEDGE OF AN ORGANIZATION IS FUNDAMENTAL TO DETERMINING INFORMATION NEEDS.

THE LIBRARY MUST KNOW ITS USERS AS INDIVIDUALS WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERTISE AND VARIED SUBJECT ORIENTATIONS, AND BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THEIR INTERESTS IN RELATION TO THE ORGANIZATION. MANY LIBRARIES MAINTAIN PROFILES WHICH IDENTIFY SPECIFIC SUBJECTS IN WHICH AN INDIVIDUAL HAS A CONTINUING OR CURRENT INTEREST; NEW MATERIAL IS DISTRIBUTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROFILES. OTHER SERVICES CAN ANTICIPATE INFORMATION NEEDS. FOR EXAMPLE, IN OUR LIBRARY EACH DAY, A NUMBER OF PERIODICALS, NEWSPAPERS, AND SERVICES ARE SCANNED FOR ARTICLES OF INTEREST TO THE BANK. THESE ARTICLES ARE MADE UP INTO TWO DIFFERENT PACKETS, ONE OF WHICH IS DISTRIBUTED TO ALL ECONOMISTS AND THE OTHER TO THE BANK'S MANAGEMENT.

TO FULLY UNDERSTAND CURRENT AND EMERGING INTERESTS AND PROBLEMS OF THE ORGANIZATION, A LIBRARY MUST HAVE A KNOWLEDGE OF THE INDUSTRY OR INDUSTRIES WITH WHICH THE PARENT ORGANIZATION IS ASSOCIATED. UTILIZING THIS SUBJECT EXPERTISE, THE LIBRARY IS ABLE TO DISCERN ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS MOST LIKELY TO BE OF CONCERN AND ORIENT ITS ACTIVITIES ACCORDINGLY IN ADVANCE OF EXPECTED DEMAND. AN ORGANIZATION IS A CREATURE OF THE TOTAL ENVIRONMENT. A LIBRARY MUST BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY AND FOLLOW THE LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND WORLDWIDE FORCES THAT MOST LIKELY WILL IMPACT ON AND ALTER THE INTERESTS OF THE CORPORATE BODY, ECONOMIC, GOVERNMENTAL, OR SOCIAL.

A LIBRARY OBTAINS A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF ITS ORGANIZATION IN PERSPECTIVE TO ITS MILIEU IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. FIRST, STAFF LIBRARIANS MUST BE

INTERESTED IN BUSINESS, THE PARTICULIAR DISCIPLINES INVOLVED, AND IN FURTHERING THE GOALS OF THE ORGANIZATION. INTEREST AND EXPERTISE CAN BE DEVELOPED THROUGH BROAD AND ACTIVE READING OF THE GENERAL BUSINESS LITERATURE AS WELL AS TRADE PUBLICATIONS OF THE INDUSTRY. IN ADDITION TO FACTUAL INFORMATION, INSIGHTS MAY BE GAINED INTO TRENDS, PROBLEMS, AND ISSUES AFFECTING THE WORLD OF COMMERCE, THE INDUSTRY, AND THE COMPANY. WITH THIS BACKGROUND, A LIBRARIAN CAN IMAGINATIVELY PERCEIVE, EVALUATE, AND CORRELATE PERTINENT INFLUENCES IN THEIR APPROPRIATE PERSPECTIVES.

WHILE MUCH VALUABLE INFORMATION CAN BE GAINED FROM PUBLIC SOURCES, A MORE INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORGANIZATION IS ESSENTIAL. A PRIME SOURCE IS INTERNALLY-GENERATED INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED TO KEEP THOSE WHO NEED TO KNOW INFORMED. A LIBRARY MUST BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK THROUGH WHICH SUCH INFORMATION AS CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS, PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS, AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES AND GOALS IS RELAYED. FURTHER INSIGHT AND KNOWLEDGE CAN BE GAINED THROUGH VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS, SUCH AS INTERNAL MEETINGS, INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH USERS AND OFFICIALS, AND EVEN THE COMMON GRAPEVINE. CERTAIN INFORMATION MAY BE PROPRIETARY, AND SHOULD BE TREATED ACCORDINGLY.

OTHER VALUABLE INDICATORS OF INFORMATION INTERESTS ARE THE VARIOUS REFERENCE QUESTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENT PATTERNS; THESE IN MANY INSTANCES PROVIDE BACKGROUND AS TO THE USE OF THE INFORMATION. REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONS TO THE COLLECTION

PROVIDE A TIMELY INDICATOR OF USER INTERESTS. OTHER INTEREST PATTERNS EMERGE WHEN THE LIBRARY IS THE CENTRAL PURCHASER OF BOOKS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION.

AN ADDITIONAL APPROACH TO CONFIRMING OR ALTERING EXISTING USER INFORMATION NEEDS ARE FEEDBACK MECHANISMS. EXAMPLES ARE REQUESTED CHANGES IN THE ROUTING OF PERIODICALS TO INDIVIDUALS, RESPONSES TO BOOKLISTS OF NEW ACQUISITIONS, AND THE TYPES OF MATERIALS BORROWED BY USERS. THIS INFORMATION IS USEFUL FOR ACQUISITIONS PURPOSES, BUT DETAILED ANALYSIS MAY REQUIRE MORE EFFORT THAN IS APPROPRIATE.

HOW EFFECTIVE A LIBRARY IS IN IDENTIFYING INTERESTS AND NEEDS IS A DIFFICULT ASSESSMENT, AND ONE THAT MAY VARY WITH THE DEGREE OF USER INTERACTION WITH THE LIBRARY. SURVEYS OF USERS' NEEDS AND SATISFACTION HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN IN BUSINESS LIBRARIES, BUT ARE NOT WIDESPREAD. THEY CAN, HOWEVER, BE CONSTRUCTIVE IN BRINGING PROBLEM AREAS TO THE ATTENTION OF THE LIBRARIAN AND HIGHER LEVEL MANAGEMENT, AND CAN ALSO PROVIDE INCREASED RECOGNITION.

THE METHODS WE HAVE DISCUSSED ARE ESSENTIALLY INFORMAL AND JUDGMENTAL, BASED ON CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE OF ALL RELEVANT FACTORS. THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LIBRARY IN IDENTIFYING AND FOLLOWING INFORMATION NEEDS IS DEMANDING, NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF SUBJECT AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE, BUT ALSO IN TERMS OF CREATIVE INVOLVEMENT. THE EFFECTIVE BUSINESS LIBRARIAN RESPONDS TO THE CHALLENGES OF A DYNAMIC, INTERACTIVE

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT. THIS MEANS SEEKING VIABLE AND IMAGINATIVE APPROACHES TO MEET CORRESPONDING CHANGES IN INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS.